

In my time I have been an on-air personality on both commercial and public radio. I spent nearly twenty years as a singer and musician. Now I write songs and books for a living. Before, during and, presumably, after all these things I am first and foremost a LISTENER. Radio led to all these things.

I was the lead guitarist/vocalist for Milwaukee Iron, the first Rock band to tour China. I've played in Panama, for American troops at the closing of the Army base there and in Japan, at the Y2K celebration for U.S. Marines stationed there. I had a #10 Indie chart country single as a recording artist. I've had four books published. I'm currently a staff songwriter for "Out of the Blue" Music. My songs have been recorded by many artists, including Mustang Sally, Jason Whitehorn and new Mercury Records recording artists James Otto. I still play out in Nashville a couple of times a week and publish an ezine, the Nashville Rant, with over 3,000 readers, which is also printed 'hard copy' in Nashville-based "Shake!" magazine. I'll stop now, before you get even MORE bored.

Some of the best moments in my life revolve around hearing 'local' material, mine and other people's, on the radio. I'll give the best one first, since I know you have a lot of reading to do. WSM-AM, home of the Gand Ole Opry, used to have a show called "Opry Star Spotlight". A friend of the producer saw me live and got me on the show. We clicked. After that, I played "Spotlight" several times a year from 1999-2002, when the huge conglomerate that owns WSM decided to cancel the show, in a unseccessful attempt to switch to a talk/sports format. WSM covers a huge area. Even my Mom, in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa could tune in and hear me on this 'local' show. It almost convinced her that what I do is a 'real' job. The first time I heard one of my songs 'on-air' was on a little college station in Vincennes, IN. I was so excited, I pulled over, looked up the station's address and 'dropped' by the studio, several hours away, to say hi. Later, I was a regular cast member of a 'Home Compani

on' style variety show on an Indianapolis college station. We got picked up by the WFMT Beethoven Satellite Network on public radio. Suddenly, people all over the country were hearing my songs. I won't even mention the dozens of live performances and interviews I've done across the country while I traveled in various bands, except to say it was always a thrill and I always made new friends and fans. Local exposure is crucial to the careers of emerging artists and stations that play local, regional and emerging talent are vital to the development of new music.

I know Clear Channel won't let this happen, but I would love to see the FCC not only define 'local programming' but also require a certain amount of local and regional music and news content. Canada's content laws have impacted the lives of Canadian recording artists, songwriters, musicians and record labels in a very positive way, at the same time helping define a sense of identity and pride in Canadian radio listener's. I think that, on a local and regional level, the same would be true here: Local and regional programming makes people feel more 'plugged in' and more emotionally invested in listening.

Local programming should include news and music produced locally by people who live in or near the community, at the very least within the broadcast range of the station.

Even more importantly, all programming decisions should be made at the local level. This is the only way to ensure responsiveness to the programming

needs of the community. Maybe a major market station like WLUP (Chicago) wouldn't best serve listener's with Sunday obituaries and recaps of girls high-school basketball games but, in lots of communities across the country, they were an important part of small town life... before the local station was bought out.

With regards to music, remember when programming decisions were local... and music was good? It's not a coincidence that these two disappeared together. I remember when, if enough people wanted to hear a song, the DJ played it. People, not pie charts, decided what would get played and how often.

Of course, there was payola but the only difference between then and now is that a big corporation pays a massive sum to an 'independant radio promoter' to get played on all network affiliate stations. It's a much more cost effective form of payola than paying each DJ individually. It keeps the money between one big coproration and another, while keeping smaller artists and labels out of the game entirely.

Back in the days of Motown, an artist with a good following could have a regional hit, then build on that success and, hopefully, hit the Billboard charts. The same was true for country artists like Loretta Lynn, who went from station to station with a box full of records and a whole lot of faith until she achieved the success she so richly deserved. Thanks to Clear Channel and other radio monopolies, that kind of "American Dream" is no longer possible.

All forms of local content, music, news, sports, etc., are good for the community. Each form should have the opportunity for representation on at least one local station. In communities with several stations, the 'local content' could be easily split up by format: News/Talk stations could have a minimum amount of local news and/or talk programming, the local music stations could each have a 'local band hour' of the appropriate format. Sports stations could broadcast high school and college games. This would help to maximize the station's earning potential for 'local programming' by appealing to significant portions of their established core listeners, while attracting new listeners (a non-football fan may very well tune in to hear his or her school or Alma Mater).

Play of local artists is perhaps the most important facet of local programming, artistically speaking: Tougher drunk driving laws (which save lives but have severely impacted local nightclub business) and the AIDS epidemic (which inhibits most people's OTHER motive for going out on the town) have lead to a steady decrease in available live music performance venues over the last twenty years. Less venues means less bands which, in turn, means less GOOD bands. Local radio play, though it doesn't pay anything, can be enough incentive to encourage the creation of new music and help to form a foundation on which new bands can develop into tomorrow's recording artists.

Local event participation should not count as 'local programming'. Acts of goodwill should be just that: Acts performed for the sole intent of fostering a healthy relationship between a business and the people of its host community. Charity should not be coerced. "The quality of mercy is not strained."

"Local programming" should be a responsibility, a duty that is inherent upon those that profit from the possession of one of the limited number of FCC licenses available in a given community. Kindness, though it, too, has its

rewards, is a choice and not a duty.

Is payola still happening? Oh, no you don't. No blacklist for me, thanks.

Let's just say it happens every day. The last song I can think of that charted without payola to an Indie promoter was David Ball's "Riding With Private Malone".

Anyone, ANYONE who advises on or makes decisions regarding radio or TV programming of any kind should be prohibited from accepting money, gifts or junkets from anyone in the entertainment business other than his or her sole employer.

Violation of this law should be a felony and anyone proved to have accepted such payment in exchange for favorable treatment should be jailed, fined and prohibited from holding such a position ever again. It is a violation, not only of federal law, but of the public trust.

Artists should be allowed to play their own music for free. However, if the artist performs songs he or she didn't write, without a release from the appropriate performing rights society, the society or songwriters should be paid a minimum amount per song.

This is one reason radio should have more detailed 'cue' sheets, like TV.

Record labels SHOULD be allowed to buy announced ads for their songs, as long as any record that doesn't violate FCC rules is given fair and equal treatment on a 'per ad' basis.

Radio stations are not, as far as I know, seeking money for 'front and back' announcing. However, word on the street is that large radio conglomerates ARE. I really think the FCC should ask for a little FBI help on this, payola and a few other things. It's so hard to catch these guys without a 'sting' operation.

Personally, I think stations should identify each song and artist at the 'back'. Remember when they used to do that more? It was educational and helped sell records.

The existing rules don't begin to cover the crimes occurring today. Radio is a public trust and station owners should, accordingly, be beholden to the public's needs and wishes.

Here's a good example of how that is NOT happening these days: The public in Atlanta wants to hear Jeffrey Steele's new record. My lawyer, who's the Jeffrey Steele fan club president for the Atlanta area organized hundreds of fans to call and email the appropriate station. When she ran into one of the DJ's, who is a friend of hers, he said "Yeah, we get tons of calls and emails, but the PD says the word from upstairs is that 'this record is not to be played on any Clear Channel station'". Curious, isn't it?

Voice tracking in general is a deceptive practice: Most people grew up with local 'on-air' talent and expect to hear it.

Purposefully deceptive broadcasts are even worse. Isn't lying 'on-air' a federal crime?

As a matter of national security, every station should have a live DJ on duty at all times. In a 'voice tracking' situation, or even in the case of a 'live' DJ being broadcast on many stations, it's much easier for one terrorist act to cut millions off from news or other vital information. So, in the name of truth in broadcasting and for the safety of the American People, all stations should have a licensed DJ on duty at all times and, as much as possible, that DJ should be 'live' in the booth to give warning, if possible, in the event of a catastrophe or terrorist act.

National playlists have been the death of good radio. Local decision makers are subject to local opinion: They meet and hear a much larger percentage of a 'local' listening audience than a national-level consultant is ever likely to. Local people are responsive to local needs.

All programming decisions should be made on the local level. After all, a 70 year old farmer in Northern Minnesota would probably not be interested in hearing an hour of New York City's best new rappers and turntablists. In the same light, a seventh grader in the Bronx might not get a kick out of the Northern regional hit "Thirty Point Buck" like the farmer would.

The FCC should mandate that all programming decisions are locally decided. I fully believe that, in the long run, this will yield a larger and more interested listening audience for radio as a whole and will better serve the needs of communities in ways that cannot be counted or measured.

LPFM's are a cool idea in that they encourage public participation from a 'broadcasting' standpoint. However, they do little to impact the 'local' listening audience in most towns.

From a music perspective, these stations aren't big enough to show up on an arbitron rating and so will do almost nothing to impact local or regional music.

I mean, I suppose you could buy one, call all your friends, at least the ones who live close, and play your music for them. But wouldn't it be better just to invite them over?

Also, I believe that I'm correct in stating that PRO's don't monitor these stations closely, if at all. This takes away the songwriter's main source of income- the penny or so performance royalty received for each 'spin' surveyed.

I would like to offer my most sincere thanks to the FCC and to each FCC employee working on this issue. You may be doing the most important work for the promoting the arts, on a national AND local level, since George Washington signed the first U.S. Copyright Act.

Your work will also impact how families, communities and regional areas receive news, music and other information. More importantly, you will help decide WHO DECIDES what we can hear.

Will it be the big corporations or will the decision be left to people and communities?

The FCC has long been a protector of the common trust and the public good. I wish you all strength in this battle as you continue the fight for the quality of programming we hope to achieve.

Thank you for caring what we think, asking our opinions and using that information to do good things for the world.

It means a lot!

CJ Watson